



Kentucky Environmental & Public Protection Cabinet

FACT SHEET

Composting

Backyard composting of certain food scraps and yard trimmings can significantly reduce the amount of waste that needs to be managed by your local government or put in a landfill. When properly composted, these wastes can be turned into natural soil additives for use on lawns and gardens and used as potting soil for houseplants.

Finished compost can improve soil texture, increase the ability of the soil to absorb air and water, suppress weed growth, decrease erosion and reduce the need to apply commercial additives.



How to compost

A compost pile can be set up in a corner of the yard with few supplies. Choose a level spot about three to five feet square near a water source and preferably out of direct sunlight. Clear the area of sod and grass. When building a composting bin with chicken wire, scrap wood or cinder blocks, be sure to leave enough space for air to reach the pile.

Many foods can be composted, including vegetable trimmings, eggshells, coffee grounds with filters and tea bags. In addition to leaves, grass and yard clippings, vacuum cleaner lint, wood and cotton rags, sawdust, shredded newspaper and small amounts of fireplace ashes can be composted.

Do not compost cat or dog waste, which may be a source of parasites or disease. Do not compost meats, dairy foods or fats, oils or grease. They can attract pests.

Start the pile with a four-inch layer of leaves, loose soil or other coarse yard trimmings. If you are going to compost food scraps (a slightly more involved process), you should mix them with yard trimmings when adding them to the pile. Alfalfa meal or clean cat litter may be added to the pile to absorb odors. In most climates, the compost is "done" in three to six months when it becomes a dark, crumbly material that is uniform in texture. By turning the pile occasionally, and watering if it becomes dry, you can speed up the process.

Spread the finished product in the garden or yard under shrubbery. Compost also can be added to potting soils.

A lot of helpful information is available on the Internet. The University of Kentucky Extension Services has several publications online at <http://www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/pubs.htm> Another good site for information on composting is www.howtocompost.org

Art courtesy of the California Integrated Waste Management Board.



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